

Public Health and Non-Profit Hospitals: Collaborating for Improved Pinellas County Community Health



Partners collaborating at CHIP meeting

Through changes stemming from the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), nonprofit hospitals now have the opportunity to direct their community benefit efforts toward public health interventions and

collaborate more effectively with county health departments. The ACA requires nonprofit hospitals to complete community-health needs assessments regularly and create a plan on how to meet community needs identified through the assessment.

The Florida Department of Health in Pinellas County is successfully demonstrating that collaboration with non-profit hospitals improves community health assessment efficiency by allowing both the health department and hospitals to do more with fewer resources.

All of the county's non-profit hospitals, including BayCare Health System (with 5 hospitals in Pinellas), All Children's Hospital, and Florida Hospital North Pinellas, and Moffitt Cancer Center in Hillsborough contacted the Health Department for input and public health expertise when conducting their assessments. Aware of the benefits of the hospitals' new assessment requirements—such as shared ownership and investment for community health—Pinellas enthusiastically shared their assessment results with the hospitals. For example, data from a large survey of community residents completed by DOH-Pinellas were shared with the hospitals and consultants conducting their assessments. This allowed the hospitals to follow up with focus groups of residents and then share the results instead of duplicating efforts with additional surveys.

The Pinellas Community Health Action Team (CHAT), a team of public health system partners led by DOH-Pinellas, includes non-profit hospital partners. CHAT oversees the development and implementation of Pinellas' community health assessment and community health improvement plan. The most recent community health improvement planning cycle in Pinellas began in 2011, before most hospitals had delved very deeply into their own community needs assessment, resulting in separate assessments for the health department and hospitals. Going forward, DOH-Pinellas hopes to go beyond information sharing with the non-profit hospitals, to fully integrating assessment processes.

Melissa Van Bruggen, from the Florida Department of Health in Pinellas County, noted that “recent mini-grants from the Florida Department of Health have provided for reliability and sustainability in health department assessment and planning activities—building confidence among partners, including hospitals, for future community health assessment integration.”

In partnership, community non-profit hospitals can draw from public health professionals' years of experience and expertise in community health assessment and health improvement planning, and public health can in turn draw on hospitals' participation and resources to strengthen their community-based health improvement efforts. It's a collaboration that will ultimately benefit the residents of Pinellas.

To learn more about CHAT and Community Health Improvement Planning in Pinellas, see <http://www.pinellaschat.com/>.